political sociology away from state-centered, class-based models of political participation, or non-participation, toward an understanding of politics as a potentiality of all social experience. It is in this sense that contemporary political sociology is concerned with cultural politics, understood in the broadest possible sense as the contestation and transformation of social identities and structures.

In the following three sections of this chapter, we will begin our discussion of political sociology with a look back at how it developed through the study of the work of the "founding fathers," Marx, Weber, and Durkheim. We will then go on to consider the "analytics of power" developed by Michel Foucault, the single most influential thinker on the development of contemporary political sociology, and the work on "governmentality" that directly draws inspiration from his writings on politics and power. I will then introduce the most important theoretical themes of contemporary political sociology and explain why the concept of "cultural politics" is so useful to understanding "politics of politics" today. Finally, there will be an outline of the chapters to follow, indicating how each one deals with a particular theme in contemporary political sociology.

Nash, Kate. 2010. Contemporary Political Sociology: Globalization, Politics & Power. MA: Wiley-Blackwell.

1.1 The Marxist Tradition of Political Sociology

In many respects, it is far from evident that the state should have a central place in Marxist analyses of capitalism, given their overwhelming theoretical commitment to the view that it is economic relations which ultimately determine all social and political life. Marx himself, concerned primarily as he was with capitalism as a mode of production, concentrated on the economic level, and had relatively underdeveloped and tentative views on the state. In fact, Adam Przeworski goes so far as to suggest that, given his theory of capitalism as a self-perpetuating economic system of production and exchange, there was no room in it for theorizing the state as contributing to its reproduction (Przeworski, 1990: 6970). Although this is an extreme view, based on Marx's later work, it is true that it has proved very difficult for neo-Marxists to give due weight to ideology and politics without giving up the central theoretical Marxist commitment to economic class struggle as the motor of history.

The roots of later Marxist theorizations of political power as a translation of economic power concentrated in the modern state are there already in Marx's writings. Although Marx had no fully developed theory of the state, he did discuss it in various ways throughout his writings. Here we

shall follow Dunleavy and O'Leary's (1987) classification of Marx's analyses of the state into three distinct and somewhat contradictory positions on how it contributes to the reproduction of the capitalist system and the economic power of the bourgeoisie. All of them have been followed up in different ways by neo-Marxist theorists (Dunleavy and O'Leary, 1987: 209). First, in the instrumental model, the coercive aspect of the state is emphasized; it is seen above all as repressive of working-class resistance to exploitation. The "executive of the modern state" is "but a committee for managing the affairs of the whole bourgeoisie" (Marx, 1977: 223). On this model, economic power is quite simply translated into political power, by which means the dominant bourgeoisie rules over subordinate classes through the liberal state. Second, in his later, more empirical writings, Marx suggested a different model of the state – the arbiter model (Dunleavy and O'Leary, 1987: 210). In "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte," he sketches the modern state in such a way as to suggest its relative autonomy from the interests of the bourgeoisie. The modern state has grown so strong that in exceptional moments, when the bourgeoisie cannot completely dominate the other classes against which it must struggle, it may become an arena for competing interests, an ostensible mediator, and may even act independently to limit the power of the bourgeoisie (Marx, 1992). However, "state power does not hover in mid-air"; it is only class interests that are represented at the political level and, ultimately, economic power will determine how state power is to be used (Marx, 1992: 237). Despite the relative autonomy of the modern state, then, economic power is translated into political power since it needs the material support of the historically ascendant class, and it therefore works ultimately to ensure the economic advantage of the bourgeoisie. Third, in his mature economic work, Marx suggested a third model of the state: the functionalist version. In this view, developed in *Capital*, volume 3, the state is "superstructural," determined entirely by changes in the economic "base" of society. The state apparatus, government, and legal forms operate in order to optimize the conditions for capital accumulation, regardless of how directly the bourgeoisie manages state institutions and irrespective of the balance of forces in society (Dunleavy and O'Leary, 1987: 21011). In this understanding of the state, political power is irrelevant; the state is but an epiphenomenon of the economic logic of the capitalist system which reproduces itself in every social and political institution to the advantage of the dominant economic class.

For some time after Marx's death, this economistic model of capitalist reproduction was Marxist orthodoxy. Although early Marxists gave some

consideration to the role of the state in sustaining capitalism, theorists such as Kautsky and Plekhanov, concerned above all to establish Marxism as a rigorous science, worked to discover the historical laws by which the economy developed. They, therefore, reduced the superstructure – the political, ideological, and cultural – to emanations of the economic base (Taylor, 1995: 24952). It is the neo-Marxist rejection of this simplistic economism which in recent years has led theorists to consider political power at the level of the state as relatively autonomous of economic power.

Neo-Marxism

Writing in the 1920s, Antonio Gramsci was the first Marxist to theorize the ideological and political superstructures as relatively autonomous of the economic base. As such, he was a major influence on other neo-Marxists such as Louis Althusser. The key term for Gramsci is "hegemony" which means the way in which the dominant class gains consent for its rule through compromises and alliances with some class fractions and the disorganization of others, and also the way in which it maintains that rule in a stable social formation (Gramsci, 1971; Simon, 1982). In terms of Dunleavy and O'Leary's typology, Gramsci's is an arbiter theory of the state: the state is formed by the balance of forces achieved in the struggle for hegemony. For Gramsci, a class does not take state power; it becomes the state (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 69). However, Gramsci is innovative in Marxism in not thinking of the state as the institution in which politics takes place. According to Gramsci, hegemony is gained in the first place in civil society where ideology is embodied in communal forms of life in such a way that it becomes the taken-for-granted common sense of the people. All relations of civil society involve issues of power and struggle, not just class relations. Politics is more a cultural sensibility than an institutional activity for Gramsci. In this respect, he has been an important influence on the political sociology of cultural politics, especially through the work of Stuart Hall in cultural studies (Morley and Chen, 1996).

Gramsci's thought in this respect was limited, however, by his commitment to economism. Gramsci, like Althusser, saw ideology as practices that form subjects; for both thinkers, our experience and our relationship to the world are mediated through ideology. In Gramsci's view, subjects are not necessarily class subjects, but rather collective political wills formed by articulating ideas and values in different combinations in order to draw different groups into the hegemonic project. However, as a

Marxist, Gramsci was committed to the belief that ideological struggle is grounded in class struggle; he, therefore, argued that there must always be a single unifying principle in every hegemonic formation and that this can only be given by a fundamental economic class. As Laclau and Mouffe (1985: 69) point out, this is not just to say that, ultimately, the economy determines politics, but also to see the economy itself as outside hegemony, as somehow naturally given and non-political. As they argue, this means that there is nothing for Marxists to do but identify the direction in which the economy is heading; there is no possibility of political intervention, or even of effective class struggle, in the domain that really matters to Marxists, the economy. In their view, Gramsci limited the scope of politics in that it should be seen as fundamental to the founding and contestation of any social order whatsoever. Gramsci's model is also limited in that, seeing politics as ultimately rooted in class struggle, it cannot give sufficient weight to social movements organized around gender, race, sexual politics, the environment, and so on. However, to reject economic determinism and the centrality of the class struggle is to go beyond Marxism altogether.

Similar issues arise in the work of Althusser. Although his project was to rescue Marxism from economism, insofar as it remains within the Marxist framework, economism cannot be avoided. Althusser maintained that the state should be seen as relatively autonomous of the economic base. However, his theory of the state is better described as "functionalist," rather than in terms of Dunleavy and O'Leary's arbiter model. Although he insists that political structures have their own laws of development, there is no discussion of class conflict at this level; the state is fully implicated in the logic of capitalism, where it functions to reproduce the mode of production (Dunleavy and O'Leary, 1987: 255). As Althusser sees it, the state is relatively autonomous of the economic base because, although the economy determines "in the last instance," it does so by determining another level of the mode of production as dominant according to the specificity of the mode of production: in feudalism, religion is dominant; in capitalism, the state. Furthermore, since the capitalist mode of production requires the state to reproduce its conditions of existence, there is a reciprocal determination between the economic and political levels; the last instance of economic determination never arrives since the economy is itself formed by the political (Althusser, 1971).

Insofar as Althusser's theory of the state is functionalist, it has been criticized as involving a sophisticated form of economic reductionism. The problem is that, if the economy is determining in the last instance, then whatever the form and dynamic of contingent, actually existing capitalist

states, ultimately they are irrelevant in relation to the necessity of the reproduction of capitalism itself. In fact, the term "relative autonomy" is oxymoronic; if autonomy is relative, then ultimately it is not autonomy at all. As Paul Hirst argues, Althusser is trapped by his own question – "how is it possible for capitalist social relations to exist?" – since there is no general answer to this question which would not involve him in the teleological logic of functionalist explanations. Althusser is searching for the causes of an existing state of affairs which the explanation then takes to be necessary for their existence; in effect, the consequences make the causes necessary (Hirst, 1979: 435). The conclusion that Hirst draws from this is that, if the relative autonomy of the state is to be taken seriously, there can be no reduction of the political to the economic: the form of social classes produced as effects of politics must be analyzed as such.

In fact, the most influential aspect of Althusser's work has been the importance he gave to issues of ideology and subjectivity. Althusser saw the state as working through the repressive institutions of the police and the army, but also through ideology embedded in state institutions – for him, a mixture of public and private institutions, including those of education, the family, trade unions, and religion. Althusser saw society as a complex of structures, each with its own dynamic, linked into a totality by the ultimate determination of the economy. The function of ideology is to make individuals into subjects who will fit the positions provided by those structures. Although it is described as consisting of "representations" – "images, myths, ideas, or concepts" – ideology does not work through the conscious mind, but in an unconscious relation to the world which is lived in social practices, such as religious rituals, political meetings, and so on (Althusser, 1971: 3944). Althusser's theory of ideology avoids the pitfalls of the Marxist notion of "false consciousness," in which people are seen as dupes of the capitalist system, since he does not see ideology as consciousness at all; in his view, ideology is itself material, involving experiences lived in real social practices. However, ideology does involve a degree of mystification in that subjects necessarily live an imaginary relation to their real conditions of existence (Barrett, 1991: chapter 5).

Althusser's lasting influence lies in the way in which he situated ideology as a matter of *practices* rather than conscious ideas and beliefs and the emphasis he gave to subjectivity as a means of social control. We will return to this point in section 1.5, where we discuss cultural politics. However, the Marxist epistemology that gave him the assurance to assert that subjects systematically misrepresent reality is problematic. Althusser maintained that Marxism is scientific because it is "open" and

"counter-intuitive," where ideology is "closed," and that it draws its problems from politics and practice rather than from critical theory (Benton, 1994: 45–9). This is problematic since Marxism has invariably seemed extremely dogmatic to non-believers, and at the same time, it has been riven by factional disputes. Furthermore, it is difficult to draw a distinction between science and ideology according to the "openness" of science given that, following Thomas Kuhn's (1970) very influential work on science; it is generally acknowledged that even the natural sciences are less concerned with genuinely testing theories than with confirming them.

1.2 The Weberian Tradition of Political Sociology

The autonomy of the political at the level of the state is central to Weber's political sociology. In fact, Weber's work stands at the beginning of a tradition of thought that is explicitly anti-Marxist on just this issue of the autonomy of the state and the importance of liberal democratic politics. As a liberal committed to the defense of individual freedom, which he saw threatened in modernity, Weber opposed his work to Marx's economic determinism. He took the concentration of the means of administration in the nation-state to be as important as the concentration of the means of production in capitalism theorized by Marx (Bottomore, 1993: 1011).

As we saw above, Weber defined power in such a way as to suggest that it may be present in all social relations, so that politics need not be seen as confined to the single arena of the state. In fact, his definition of politics is also very broad: "[it] comprises any kind of *independent* leadership in action" (Weber, 1948a: 77). Despite these definitions, however, Weber immediately narrowed the field of his analysis to the power and politics of the nation-state. He saw the state as the most powerful institution in modern society since it has gained the legitimate monopoly of force over a given territory, and, therefore, took politics to involve "striving to share power or striving to influence the distribution of power, either among states or among groups within a state" (Weber, 1948a: 78). As David Held points out, Weber's emphasis on territoriality is crucial; the modern state is a nation-state in competitive relation to other nation-states, rather than with armed segments of its own population (Held, 1987: 150). Weberian sociology, therefore, explicitly shares the propensity of sociology in general, and included Marxism in the ways we have discussed, for taking total societies organized around nation-states as the object of its analysis.